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SAN FRANCISCO

If the United States fails to go ahead with President Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, the Soviet Union will gain a unilateral military advantage, the CIA's deputy director said.

"Failure to proceed with an American strategic defense would hand the Soviets a unilateral military advantage of historic consequence," Robert Gates told the World Affairs Council Tuesday night.

Gates said the Soviet Union has spent more money and more time than the United States on defensive research and weapons that would protect the country in the event of a nuclear war.

"The Soviets believe that nuclear war could occur and, in light of that fact, they have designed their military programs to try to enable the Soviet Union to survive and to prevail," Gates said.

"It is ironic that the U.S. effort to achieve strategic defense is the focus of world attention, as if the Soviet program had never existed."

He said, "It is our judgment that over the past 10 years the Soviet Union has spent nearly a \$150 billion on strategic defense, or almost 15 times what the United States has spent."

He said the Soviet Union has been working since the late 1960s on advanced technologies for strategic defense, "technologies which the U.S. is intending to explore in its strategic defense initiative program."

"The Soviets have been working as long as the United States in laser, particle beam, kinetic energy and microwave technologies applicable to strategic weapons."